

**ROUNDTABLE/WORKING MEETING
BETWEEN THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL
COMMITTEE**

DATE Monday, November 16, 2015

TIME 5:31 PM

LOCATION Sullivan Chamber

PURPOSE Roundtable/working meeting between the School Committee and the City Council

ATTENDEES Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan, Councillor Carlone, Councillor Cheung, Councillor Kelley, Councillor Mazen, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Simmons, Councillor Toomey, Richard Rossi, City Manager, Lisa Peterson, Deputy City Manager, Louis DePasquale, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal Affairs, Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, Jeana Franconi, Budget Director, Jefferson Smith, Chief of Staff for Mayor Maher, Sandra Albano, Executive Assistant to the City Council, Paula Crane, Deputy City Clerk, and Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk.

OTHER ATTENDEES School Committee members: Fran Cronin, Alfred Fantini, Richard Harding, Jr., Kathleen Kelly, Patty Nolan and Mervan Osborne. Judy Martin, Executive Secretary to the School Committee, Jeffrey Young, Superintendent of Schools, Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, James Maloney, CEO, School Department, Claire Spinner, CFO, School Department, Ms. MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education, Robin Harris, Principal, Fletcher Maynard Academy and Jessie Wenning, Kindergarten Staff Developer.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Mayor Maher convened the meeting at 5:31 PM. He announced that there would be no public comment. No votes would be taken and the meeting would not be publicly recorded.

Mayor Maher stated that there are 3 main issues that will be discussed this evening. He asked for a brief overview regarding the security issues that happened in the School Department and in the City. After, the **Early Childhood Task Force report** and then a short time will be spent with an update on the School Building issues at the King building and the pending work that will be done at the Cambridge Street Upper School.

Mr. Rossi stated that there was an e-mailed message concerning a bomb threat at Cambridge Public Schools.

Commissioner Haas stated that there was e-mail that stated that there would be a bomb at Cambridge Schools. Once notified, he spoke with Mr. Maloney. He stated that this was placed on a blog site. They worked out an initial plan where officers teamed up with School Department personnel. He stated

they brought in bomb technicians in the event that anything was found. Nothing was found. He then met with the City Manager.

Superintendent Young stated that they made sure that the schools were checked out. He stated that personnel launched into emergency operations protocol. The protocol comes out of the Emergency Operations Plan that was developed with collaboration between many departments in the City. He stated that the protocol calls for threat assessment. This was not sent to any school personnel. He stated that walk-throughs were conducted. They determined that there was no credible threat and decided to keep schools open. He stated that it is important to get information out fast, yet accurate. They chose to make sure that the information was accurate. He then sent out a message at approximately 10:45 a.m. He thanked the City Manager for his help and support.

Mr. Rossi stated that one of the best things that can be done in the aftermath is to meet to see if there can be tweaks or any improvement made to the process. He stated that they will reevaluate the response and what could potentially be changed. He stated that he will ensure that documentation is updated as appropriate.

Mayor Maher stated that the meeting will now focus on the early childhood education piece.

Mr. Rossi stated that the Early Childhood Task Force is pleased to present the plan to the city. It is a result of about 15 months' worth of work that was started in February of 2014. The Superintendent joined him with key staff members. He asked the members of the task force that were present to stand. He introduced David Jacobson and Linda Warren, the consultants who guided the task force through the process. He stated that he did not really understand the depth of what a great program can be. He stated that they looked at research across the country. He stated that although he believes that a building will be purchased in the future, the first few years of the process is to understand the needs of the community. He stated that in thinking of the needs, one thing was clear: not everyone wanted their programs dismantled and not be funneled into one program. He stated that there are resource, educational, training and informational needs.

There was a PowerPoint presentation ([ATTACHMENT A](#)). He spoke of the burden of people who have needs. There was a gap between what is done and what is needed. A needs assessment was conducted. The consultants have looked at the best practices across the country. He suggested following the recommendations of the task force and this will lead to the best program. He applauded workers who went over and above their work requirements on this. He wanted to have the finance employees involved and the projections are within the budget and approved by finance team. He outlined the financial allocation needed for the next three years. This is being built from the ground up and it is the right way to go and this will be a strong program. This will be a model for the entire country if the recommendations are followed.

Superintendent Young stated that this is as important as this gets. The achievement gap does not begin in the 5th grade; it begins earlier. The right way to make a difference is to start early. It is not about funneling all into one approach. Good access to programs for every child is needed. He stated that equity is about access. This task force report seeks to provide every child early access to education. He asked that this be thought about from a child or baby's perspective to be set up for success. If you are not a proficient reader by grade three it will be more difficult to learn. He stated that excellence and access go together. When the child is in the center and the adults are on the outside of the child the child succeed. Mr. Rossi stated that the report is an action plan and does

not require another report. The report highlights the goals and milestones. The City needs to provide a unified system from birth through their entire education.

Ms. Semonoff stated that all best practices were reviewed and this was looked at locally for local service providers. Focus groups were created to get community input.

Ms. MacDonald stated that what emerged from the needs assessment and national research confirmed the number of availability and services in Cambridge but also showed the lack of a coherent systems. She stated accessing information was difficult and she heard this from Cambridge parents in focus groups. They also found maintaining and improving quality around the programs is vital. The next finding: aligning and coordinating services between and among services. She stated that children and families benefit when services are coordinated for addressing the critical gaps, affordability and access. Ms. MacDonald stated that the task force used this information and research to develop 3 overarching priorities that guided the recommendations of the task force: start early, quality is essential and the building of a coherent mixed-delivery system.

Ellen Semonoff talked about the five goals identified by the task force: Access to and affordability of high quality early education and care services, program quality, building of family engagement and support partnerships, improve access to quality healthcare services and develop a shared governance and leadership infrastructure. She spoke of the need for more and better information for parents. The recommendation is to have access to what is available in Cambridge. She spoke about the important of the value of high quality home visits; study what the City has and provide for the families that need it the most. The largest aspect is to support teacher for children birth to age 3. Increase of access to available program is needed. She spoke about what happens to 3-4 year olds. The recommendation is to provide scholarship to low-income families so that they have access to high quality programs. All 4 year olds are enrolled in programs in the City. The issue is quality, affordability and access. All existing programs will be reviewed. More support will be provided for low-income families. One of the recommendation is addressed to the School Committee to separate all junior K and kindergarten classes.

Maryann MacDonald stated that the program quality had three recommendations. They were to build capacity and improve program quality. It is unknown what early childhood educators need. Capacity must be built to improve program quality in the creation of the position of Early Childhood Director and Program Quality Specialist as well as to develop a Quality Improvement Plan and improve transitions, collaboration and coordination. Goal 3 was to build family engagement and support partnerships focused on family engagement. Family's voices are critical on this matter. Review of the parent education programs are recommended.

Ms. Semonoff talked about improving access to quality healthcare services. She stated that the idea is to deeply collaborate with the Cambridge Health Alliance and the Department of Public Health. She stated that the City has been fortunate to support training and behavioral health support to childcare programs and those services are critical to support staff to ensure that children are able to remain in early childhood programs. She stated that providing support on-site to programs is essential. She spoke about children being expelled from early childhood programs and the need to expand access to quality mental and behavioral health services.

Ms. MacDonald spoke on Goal 5. She stated three committees will be created. The task force is recommending the development of an Early Childhood Governance Board, creation of Early

Childhood Director and Program Quality Specialist, development of a strategic plan with targeted outcomes and strengthening of public awareness.

Ms. Semonoff stated that they anticipate coming back to the City Council to ask for some funding to be able to continue the work between now and June 30, 2016. She stated that in the rough calculations what would be needed to roll out in the first year is \$1.3 million. They would also ask for additional funds for the early access, health and program quality. A strategic plan will be developed. Public awareness program will be strengthened. Early year's program will be expanded. Mr. Rossi stated that this is expanded funding and not challenging funding. This has been built into the City's projections. Ms. Semonoff asked Mr. Jacobson and Ms. Warren for their perspectives.

Mr. Jacobson stated that he would like to draw attention to page 8 of the report. You will find three priorities: Start early, quality is essential and to build a coherent mixed-delivery system. He stated that very early on the point was made to the task force that there is no better research than on prenatal care. He stated that the first priority begins with that. Nationally, we see disconnects across the country of a fragmented early childhood system.

Linda Warren stated that the part they are working on is the early childhood piece. She stated that they are seeing through the needs assessment that there is a large number of high quality programs operating in Cambridge. She stated that not everyone looks at quality in the same way. There is not a set of assessments to guide early education practices. She stated that they are marrying the idea of quality and outcomes in the report.

Councillor Carlone stated that the report and the scope are impressive especially with community building and working with what exists. He asked if the 4 year old programs are they full day programs. He asked where the City is on 2, 3, and 4 year olds. He understood that expansion and upgrade of programs is needed and he did not hear this. Ms. Semonoff stated that most of 4 year olds are in School Department programs and there is no charge and if they are in a City or a community program there is a fee and they are full day. The issue of affordability and full day is a live issue. There are about 900 four year children of which 790 were identified in a program, but private program where not identified. She stated that the City does not have the data for 2 and 3 year olds, where children are located and the affordability issue will need to be reviewed. Mr. Rossi stated that this is the beginning of this conversation and if the City and School Department are working together there will be opportunities to expand. He stated that even the private facilities need to be upgraded and this will be where the difficulty lies.

Councillor McGovern stated that this has been a long time coming -- moving toward a systemic early childhood education program. He asked what will be done when the early childhood people begins to retire. He questioned the 3 year process - he asked where does the City hope to be in 3 years and what is beyond this. Mr. Rossi stated that hiring the staff and getting started should take six months; another year to review. He spoke about the lack of access to information. Whatever it takes to determine the quality across the board will be a step by step process. This program will incrementally grow this program to success. He stated that he will be able to provide status reports and the timeline of when the goals and objectives are achieved. Councillor McGovern asked how the children that are being provided home day care being supported. Ms. Semonoff stated that the family support programs and the home visits are the focus on the interaction. Councillor McGovern asked how quality will be defined. Ms. MacDonald stated that there are experts that look at the whole child. She stated that there are new state standards on quality. Councillor McGovern asked where all things are tied together as a comprehensive plan for all the City to

include income security, hunger issues and affordable housing. He suggested a human services master plan. Ms. Semonoff responded that the city-wide process includes this process. The plans is about what kind of community we want.

Councillor Simmons spoke about all the other forces that impact the families and the whole child. It is important to get this done. She stated that what impacts effectively working together is not being in the same building. She asked if there is a way to put all the early childhood programming in the same place. She stated that the Family Resource Center was an important connector to home based child care, are they involved, she asked? How does this impact independent child care programs? Mr. Rossi stated that the City needs to assess each program so that everyone is trained and move equally across the board in the City. This needs to start slow to achieve this. Councillor Simmons stated that the information has to be two-way. She stated that cultural competency should be a goal; it is not part of our DNA yet and needs to be looked at. She spoke about benchmarks and quality how do we know when we are there. She wanted this out in front before this gets launched. Mr. Jacobson stated that what they have in the recommendations is 75% of a plan and the missing 25% is the benchmarks. Councillor Simmons stated that the 25% should be in place before moving forward. She stated that she feels family involvement is fragmented. She stated that we must be better at looking at how we engage families. She stated that community involvement is not easy. She asked where Baby U and family liaisons fit in this model. Ms. Semonoff responded that they were listed as family support programs that would be expanded through this project. She asked for information about the budget. Ms. Spinner stated that the planning is between January and June of 2016. She stated that this is the money in FY 2016 which is the remainder of the second half of the fiscal year. She stated that this is a planning period and in FY17 they have funding for new positions and the development of a professional plan. She stated that \$100,000 is for the assessment and implementing the home visits. Councillor Simmons stated that she wanted to see this in writing as well as what the cultural competency and family engagement will look like. She asked what affordability means and why is there no money for family engagement.

Mr. Fantini stated that he appreciates the effort and work of the task force. He stated that one issue to quality daycare is the salary of workers. He asked how other providers pay the salaries that will improve the quality of care. Ms. Semonoff stated that there is not a plan at the moment to effect the salary scale across the City; this is a set of recommendation and this has been structured with objectives that are 75% and the benchmarks are at 25%. Mr. Rossi stated that a quality program will attract quality staff. Ms. Warren stated that funding is being attached to quality ratings. What will keep these gains going? Ms. Semonoff stated that if the work is continued from K; it is the work before children enter public school and then the school takes over. Mr. Fantini spoke about three immersion programs. Who will run the strategic plan? Mr. Rossi responded that it will emanate from the staff.

Ms. Nolan stated that this is a long time coming, but once this got started it was put together quickly. She noted that brain growth research has increased in the last few years. She stated that families that are in crisis or trauma need to be taken into this. She questioned the definition of quality.

Ms. Warren stated that they have been looking at work nationally which focuses on building a system of high quality. She stated the equity and cultural competence lens has been useful. Ms. Nolan stated that she is pleased that it is a joint effort but she would not mind that the city take the lead on this initiative. Mr. Rossi stated that they are not asking departments to do things that they specifically

do not do. Mr. Jacobson stated that the loudest message they got from community based providers is that they are not part of the system but they do want to be.

Fran Cronin it is exciting that this is a joint conversation and is breaking down the silo that prevented moving forward. How do we tap the mothers who are expecting to make use of prenatal care, etc? How do we sustain the support? Cambridge is doing front-end investment; she suggested a regional effort. She stated that families with the greatest need are in CHA developments; who do we access these families. She spoke about coordination and not having redundancies. She stated that data needs to be collected to see if there is success and the data needs to be coordinated and aligned.

Vice Mayor Benzan asked how many day care providers are here. Mr. Rossi stated that there are 3 day care providers on the task force. Vice Mayor Benzan stated he will see success when the critical mass of low income kids moves to middle income. He wanted the focus to be on economic justice. Math, science, art and language are important to the children. The development of children needs to be looked at holistically. Housing is needed.

Mervan Osborn asked how detailed did the task force get on the buildings. Mr. Rossi stated that this was not delved into. The task force moved the needle. He wants to move this plan. He stated that 2 more schools are planned to be renovated. Mr. Osborn asked what does the Early Childhood Director look like. Ms. Semonoff stated that this position would report to School Department and the Department of Human Service Programs.

Councillor Cheung stated that Cambridge has the best Human Services Department. Cambridge has a fantastic commitment to its children. He stated that he is frustrated and disappointed. He stated that he was hoping that the questions that were asked would have already been answered. He stated that he feels that he has been attending many open houses for pre-k. He stated that his friends and peers are leaving the City because they cannot afford to pay for childcare. He stated that we know how to reach kids, let's just do it. He stated that there are parents where both parents are working two jobs. We need this to move forward. He stated that he would like to know what it will cost to have early childhood education for all children. He stated that space is not the issue. He stated that every year that we do not work on this issue we are losing children.

Richard Harding when you take on something of this scale it has to be done right. He asked about the intention on this effort. There is a difference between child care and early education. He spoke about the readiness aspect. He wanted to understand what he is supporting. This needs to be defined and the alignment to the end game to end the education gap. Home child care may not be heavy on the educational aspect. He asked what the end game to end the achievement gap is. This has been used as another tool to end the achievement gap. Ms. Semonoff spoke about standards for child care provider that line up with the domains for early childhood education. As a system the City needs to work with all the providers and make sure that the standards are being met and support is provided to these programs. He stated that alignment takes time. Ms. MacDonald stated that this is work to support the whole student. This needs to be a seamless transition when children come to school. Mr. Harding stated that the issue is around affordability. A conversation is needed about what is the affordability context; will it be a sliding scale. This is a big deal to many people.

Kathleen Kelley stated that she is proud to be in Cambridge. Early childhood education is getting the respect it deserves as well as the children aged 0-3. She stated that play is a child's work. Learning is fun and this sets up children on their path to learn. She wanted creativity and imagination throughout the entire system 0-12.

Councillor Cheung stated that he has confidence that the program will be high quality; but it is not our kids in these programs.

Mayor Maher thanked the task force and the presenters. All are excited about this and how this can be a shared vision. There will not be a discussion on the school facilities.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion of School Committee Member Fantini the meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM.

A TRUE COPY:

**ATTEST:-
Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk**

A list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting:

Recommendations of the Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force